

THINK POSITIVE

IMPACT

REPORT

2023-2024

think⁺
positive about
student mental health



nusscotland
national union of students

nuscharity
national union of students

thinkpositive.scot

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Who we are

Think Positive is a Scottish Government funded student mental health project at NUS Charity & NUS Scotland.

We want to ensure that student mental health needs are better supported and promoted in further and higher education. Think Positive brings together a network of colleges, universities and students' associations to share resources, learn from each other, highlight good practices and challenges within the sector.

Together we have oversight of the fantastic mental health work taking place across Scotland's colleges and universities. Collectively, we actively contribute to the wellbeing of Scotland's students and improve the quality of available mental health support.



Think Positive project outcomes 2023–2024

1

Students' associations, colleges and universities across Scotland will have a more joined up approach when supporting student's mental health.

2

Students' associations, colleges and universities across Scotland will improve their mental health support on offer, and create better links with wider services and supports.

3

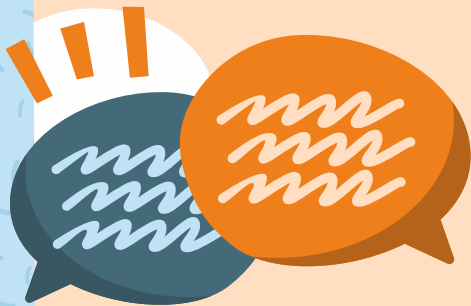
Students' associations, colleges and universities across Scotland will be better equipped to build upon their mental health work.

This impact report is a snapshot of the difference the Think Positive Project has made in the 2023-2024 academic year.

We directly supported and collaborated with

86%

of Scotland's colleges, universities & students associations on their mental health work.



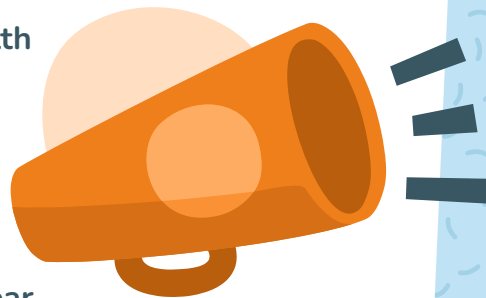
54%

of institutions told us that they have been able to create better links with external organisations as a result of working with Think Positive.

We promoted the mental health support on offer at

100%

of Scotland's **colleges & universities** throughout the year.



"The value of the Think Positive project cannot be overstated. Because of Think Positive's work colleges, universities and students' association across Scotland are offering better joined up, quality mental health support services which have been tailored to suit the specific needs of students today. I've seen for myself that services like The Forum, Think Positive Hub, and the Student Mental Health Agreement project are absolutely vital to students' associations as they work to ensure that the students they represent receive the support they need to not just survive but thrive."

– Ellie Gomersall,
NUS Scotland President
2022-2024



Student Mental Health Agreement project

Think Positive's **Student Mental Health Agreement** project (SMHA) is a partnership project between the students' association and college or university. The project sets a clear framework to help promote and develop their mental health support offer in collaboration with students. The project helps them to consider what is working well and where improvements could be made.

During August 2023–May 2024

As a result of taking part in our Student Mental Health Agreement Project participants told us:

0%

Not
Likely

Likely

Extremely likely

Project participants said they would recommend taking part in the project, with **52%** responding extremely likely.

83%

said taking part ensured that mental health work is a key priority for the institution and students' association.

71%

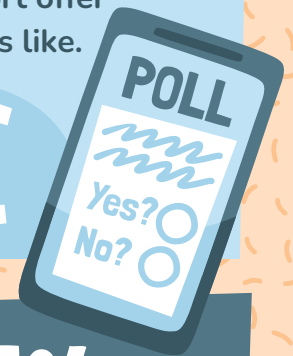
said that feedback and collaboration with students has shaped what their support offer looks like.

88%

said that taking part improved the partnership between the Students' Association & institution.

71%

reported their mental health work had developed as a result of taking part.



Think Positive
provided **28**

1:1 video consultancy support
sessions to colleges, universities
and students' associations
across Scotland for FREE.



**student
mental health
agreement**



71%

reported that the project
has helped them to under-
stand what is going well
and identify areas for
further development.

Colleges, universities and
students' associations
engaged with

300+

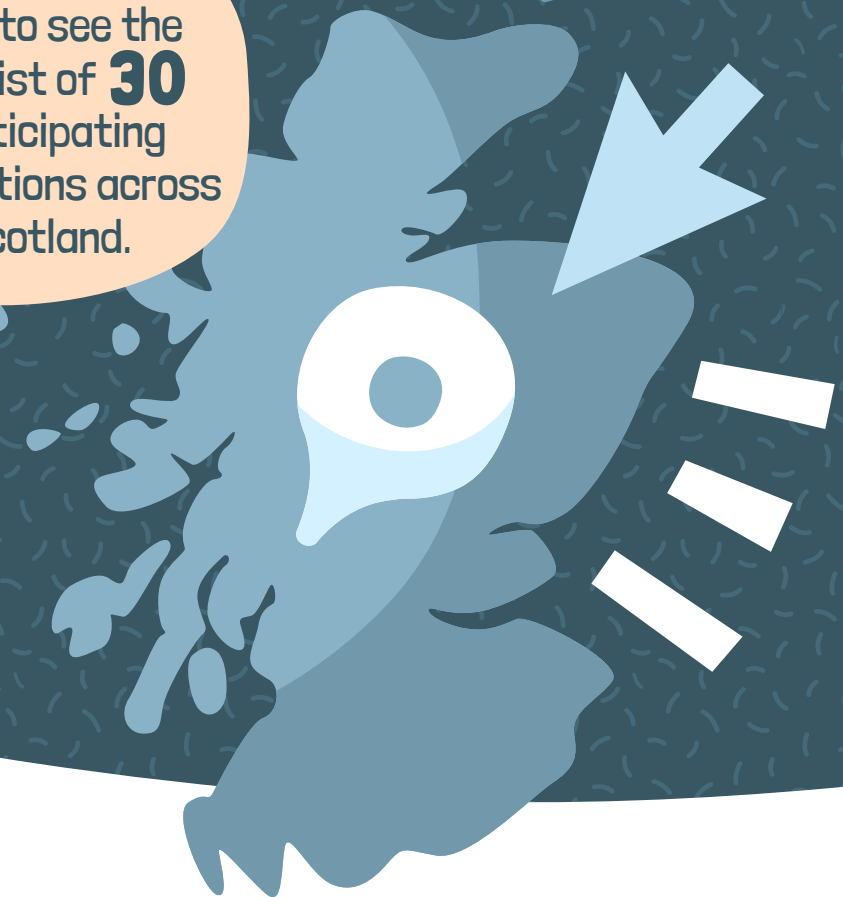
external organisations
throughout the academic
year on their mental
health work.

Click on the
map to see the
full list of **30**
participating
institutions across
Scotland.



Project Participants
(2023–2024)

- 50%** SMHA in place
- 27%** developing a new SMHA
- 23%** updating their current SMHA



Continued benefits

Project participants told us that they also experienced these additional benefits as a result of taking part in the Student Mental Health Agreement project.

71%

Reported that they now have a more joined up approach on their mental health work.

71%

Said they have gained a better insight into the approaches other colleges, universities and students' associations are taking in their mental health work.

71%

Told us that multiple people from the institution and students association are now working together on mental health and wellbeing work.

67%

Said that it has improved how their mental health & wellbeing work is monitored and evaluated

67%

Reported that their mental health & wellbeing work has been more structured with clearer aims.

54%

Said they had gained a better understanding of how their students want to be supported.

Participants' feedback

"The experience is excellent, we find the student mental health agreement invaluable in enhancing the support and provisions for mental health and wellbeing with our students."

"It's all been positive from my perspective. Think Positive staff are very approachable and understanding of some of the challenges. I think that their feedback on our SMHA did improve it by making it more specific."

"Working with Think Positive has helped us to focus on what initiatives would benefit and support mental health, for example focusing on student poverty as a link with mental health has been really important. Also hearing about best practice from other institutions is always helpful to gain insight into what is happening in the wider sector."

"We've worked with Think Positive for a number of years and I'm always impressed at how they are constantly looking to improve and increase on the ideas/support available each year. The team all work incredibly hard and their support and patience is very much appreciated."

"Our Action Plan – which underpins the Agreement – has acted as a framework for many joint activities throughout the academic year."

"Think Positive have been so useful when working on the SMHA Project as they offered great advice and guidance and were available to support in whatever way was required. They helped making the process of creating the agreement a little easier, it is a very time consuming piece of work but has been very valuable for the College and for me personally to work on and undertake all the steps to help create it."

"Think Positive have been extremely helpful with the SMHA. We were given suggestions on how to better promote the SMHA. The team are very friendly."

"I have had an unbelievable experience, Think Positive staff have been so helpful and really helped and motivated us with our SMHA work. I have found them incredibly approachable (even online!)."

"It's been extremely useful. Your level of support and the commitment for institutions is at a great level. The SMHA has really improved our joint working and our offer to students."

"Think Positive has been a resource we have utilised, particularly in developing our new SMHA plan, and they have given us useful advice on how our plan may work out. Since then, we have created a working group that has different departments share their thoughts and we all work together to make sure all students are being centered in the process."

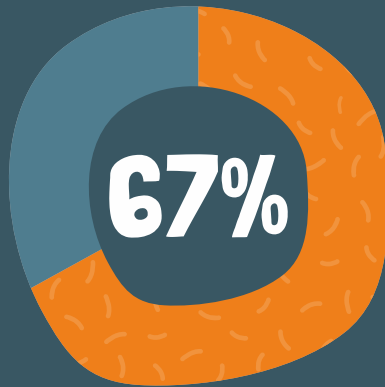
"Being involved has been fantastic and such a great place to help share best practice and brainstorm."

"The team do a fantastic job and are always extremely helpful and professional – I can't think of anything they could do to improve on this! Nothing ever seems to be too much trouble and they have a wealth of knowledge to help guide institutions on their SMHA journey."

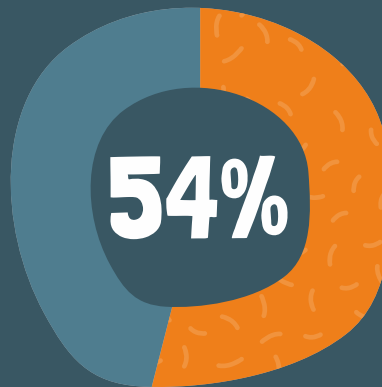


Opportunities for development

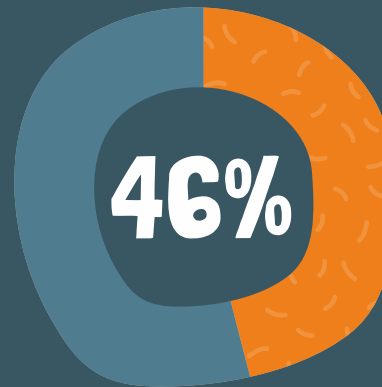
Project participants told us that they experienced the following challenges when taking part in the SMHA project.



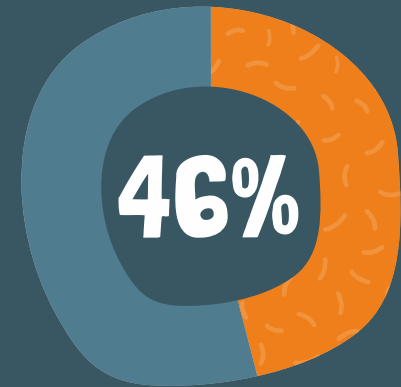
Lack of internal resources (including time, support, people and structures).



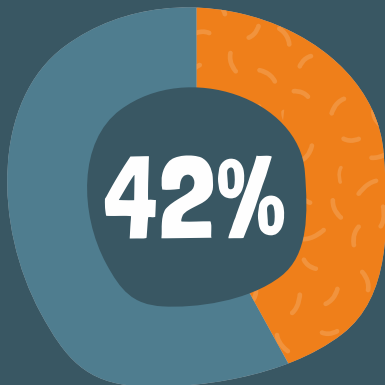
Keeping engaged in this work during busy periods of the year.



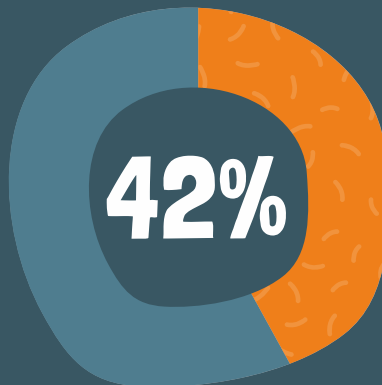
Changes in people's roles at the students' association/institution.



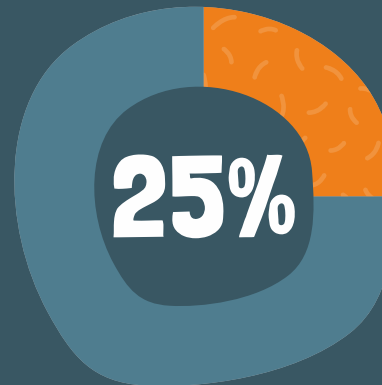
Lack of SMHA handover when SMHA leads change.



Ensuring we have good monitoring processes and/or success measures.



Getting students involved in SMHA work.



Challenges with the working group.



What else could be better?

"Maybe a lack of understanding around the project for senior leadership. It's not that they don't 'buy-in' but just their understanding of why and how the SMHA exists/is made."

"I think Think Positive can result in duplication of effort within a university, most universities now have their own student mental health policies with action plans (which may dovetail with staff policies and plans too). I feel that Think Positive SMHA is an additional process to go through. I like the emphasis on student engagement but this isn't funded so we are reliant on student's volunteering their time to be involved."

"I believe that Think Positive was important and useful 10+ years ago when it was part of the university's outcome agreement. It forced university leadership to look and address something which was still mostly below the radar. Since then student mental health has a really different public narrative around it and also the project has helped embed a lot of positive work into universities."

"Help us with engaging students throughout the year."

"This is been an excellent piece of work. However, from doing the project over a number of years we don't feel that we necessarily have to meet up with the Think Positive lead every year to launch our new campaign. Especially when a new agreement is in development. This could be optional for participants who have had a number of years experience. As and when required for a check-in."

"We need to improve the internal handover process for when SMHA leads change."

"It's been great – if anything our team hasn't made enough use of what's on offer."

Think Positive Hub

The **Think Positive Hub** brings together all the latest projects, services, resources, training and news relating to student mental health in Scotland in one place so students and those who support them can easily access it. The Think Positive Hub also highlights a summary of the mental health support services available at every college and university in Scotland, which are updated by colleges and universities themselves every six months.

Available **24/7 365** days of the year for students, staff and the wider sector to access for **FREE**.

Between June 2023–May 2024



Shared the work colleges, universities and students' associations are taking forward through spotlight blogs. To both celebrate their work and allow others to learn from their approaches.

52,269
pages viewed.



89,122
impressions

through Think Positive social media channels.



81

organisations promote their mental health work on the Think Positive Hub.



The most viewed pages throughout the year related to seeking support at college/university, finding external mental health support services, using the search function and the Student Mental Health Agreement project.

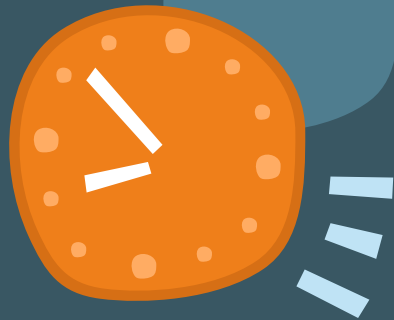


Resources were downloaded
1,406
times.



Shared multiple articles highlighting the work colleges, universities and students' associations are taking forward, including for **LGBT+ History Month** and **Mental Health Awareness Week**.

"The Think Positive Hub webpages are an incredible resource of information for Scotland's FE and HE!"



384
hours

spent by users accessing mental health resources and information.

12,027
sessions.

"The access we get to information from other mental health charities etc has been really useful. We've also benefited from the co-production seminars you organised last year – we've implemented these learnings and I hope we'll continue to do so."

183

resources shared.
This includes mental health services, projects, tools, news, blogs and research.

"Think Positive resources are clear, useful, and understandable and without some of the online resources it would've been much more challenging to create."

"The Hub is the 'go to' resource for staff and students alike and the resources have contributed to our support efforts and the creation of a mentally healthy campus."

The Forum

Think Positive organises and facilitates a space for representatives from colleges, universities and students' associations across Scotland meet to discuss the challenges and opportunities they are facing around topics relating to student mental health in Scotland. **The Forum** enables those working in the sector to share best practices, learn from each other and share their work.

During October 2023–May 2024



The Forum meetings facilitated, bringing those involved in mental health work at colleges, universities and students' associations across Scotland together.

90%

of SMHA project participants attended at least one The Forum meeting. **67%** attended at least 5 meetings.

Attendance ranged from

11–26

members for each meeting.

27

Scottish colleges, universities and students' associations represented.



"The forum is interesting and a great way to learn about different projects across the sector."

"I find The Forum sessions a great way to connect with others to hear about their initiatives."

"The Forum meetings are informative and interesting."

I think having the opportunity for different institutions to meet and discuss activity is excellent and creates a supportive atmosphere. It's always helpful having external speakers to learn more about community support available and how this can work in tandem with the College's support."

Project participants reported the following benefits of participating in The Forum.

79%

Said they have learnt from the experiences and approaches of other institutions and students' associations.

54%

Said they appreciated having a safe space to share the challenges and opportunities they face with their work.

67%

Told us that they feel more connected to representatives from other colleges, universities and students' associations.

54%

Told us that they felt better equipped to build upon their mental health and wellbeing work as a result of attending.

63%

Reported that they valued learning from external speakers.



What can Think Positive do to improve The Forum?

"Keep up the encouragement so that more institutions will join. Meetings also can feel rushed in places because there are so many great conversations and so much to say, but time constraints. More encouragement for attendees to connect outside of meetings."

"I think there should be a lot more SA-centric forums, as not all FEs can relate to what other institutions are doing in terms of funding."

"For us, our SMHA is in its very last phase before we write a new one, and our current agreement has been another way to monitor existing work (rather than creating lots of new activities as such). I think I'll find The Forum of more benefit when we come to writing the new agreement and we need new ideas."

"Have a yearly calendar of dates in advance. Or perhaps 2 calls on the same topic to allow flexibility for people to attend."

"I find the meetings very helpful and think the format works well. I wonder if it would be helpful to have a community page for the SMHA leads to post questions and share info with each other would be possible? I'm a member of UMHAN who have this function and its very useful."

There tends to be wide variations in terms of budgets, resources etc. between colleges and universities; more transparency around the funding and costs of certain activities would be beneficial to help other institutions understand what would be required in order to replicate, or take ideas from, a case study, project etc."

"Yearly conference to allow us to meet each other... speakers and break away groups for us to learn from each other."

"A forum session on demonstrating impact/evaluation/success measures might be good."

Impact on students

During August 2023–May 2024

45,994+
students

accessed the support highlighted within their institutions Student Mental Health Agreement.

The work taken forward as part of the SMHA project had the potential to benefit

438,792+
students



9,454+
students

consulted with on their institutions Student Mental Health Agreement.

934+
students

developed and delivered the work within Student Mental Health Agreements.

How have students benefited from your college/university/students' association working with Think Positive?

"Working with Think Positive has improved how we engage with our students regarding our mental health agreement. We have used the support the staff have given us to ensure that students are prioritised in the decision-making of our liberation work but in their mental health."

"Ensuring this is a partner approach, and the needs of students are listened to. A way of ensuring students are creators of activities and action to improve their own health and well-being and that of their peers."

"We've co-created numerous projects with and for students to support their mental health and wellbeing – this has included paid student roles, student campaign work displayed across campus, additional services and provisions, and more."

"Students have benefited (or soon will benefit) from specific projects, including free revision week activities, more compassionate or easier to access academic policies, and an increased focus on alcohol and drug harm reduction."

"They have had a part to play in the creation of the SMHA so they are able to see the value of the contribution."

"We now offer a range of supports for students such as wellbeing days, where different members of the school have worked closely together. We offer mental health training to various staff and reslife staff so that they can support students who are struggling with their mental health. We have made stronger links with a variety of community services, resulting in a smoother process for students who are engaging with them."

"Without the SMHA we would not have taken the initiative to explore the students' wellbeing needs, and committed to working on these."

"Clear aims, in one place and focus groups/student surveys, being more open to students about our support offer."

"Students have benefited from the SMHA Project as the college have listened to their voices and can see exactly what has supported them at college and what could help them more. Therefore their suggestions and ideas are listened to and are reflected in our SMHA."

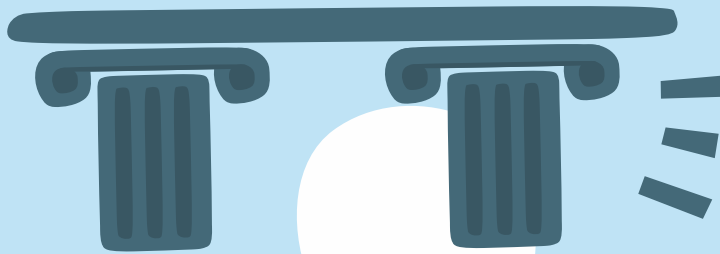
"A more clear vision and understanding of what *** University does for students mental health."

"It has allowed more work to be done and events to be held. This raises awareness and helps to destigmatize mental health. Students are more aware of the work we are doing towards mental health."

Working with the sector

Between August 2023–May 2024

Supported and influenced by members of Think Positive's Project Advisory Group which includes students, College Development Network, Colleges Scotland, ScotSMART, SAMH, Scottish Funding Council, Scottish Government, Scottish Recovery Network, South Lanarkshire College, Universities Scotland and University of the Highlands and Islands.



FORUM

Collaborated with LGBT Youth Scotland, Suicide Prevention Scotland and Scottish Recovery Network to facilitate sessions at The Forum.

Directly supported

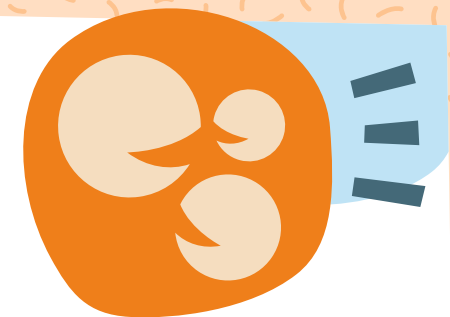
**30
out of 35**

colleges, universities and students' association to develop their mental health work.

Awarded funding from the Scottish Government to continue our work during 2024-2025.



Took part in the Scottish Governments consultation on the Student Mental Health Action Plan, providing both in person and written recommendations.



Received funding from See Me to collaborate with them on the See Me See Change project.

Thank you

to all of the colleges, universities
and students' associations who
collaborated with us and shared
their experiences.



For more information, contact us:
ThinkPositive@nus-scotland.org.uk

